

Virtual Special Education & Student Supports Sub-Committee  
Wednesday, November 18, 2020  
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio  
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA

Called for the for the purpose of discussing the reading level benchmark data, resources to scholars reading below grade level, dyslexia indicators, and professional development to educators. The meeting started at 6:00 p.m.

Members Present: Member Wilson, Chair; Member Rachel, Member Weinstein

Also Present: Dr. Morgan, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services; Dr. Gittens, Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Schools; Jean Spera, Special Educator Director; Dr. Madera, Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education; Dr. Grace, District Coordinator of Inclusive Education, Instruction and Curriculum

Member Wilson opened the meeting and provided context of the meeting. There have been questions about how we are determining reading level benchmarks and disseminating the information and how do we support our scholars who are reading below grade level and are the other opportunities and tools to support growth in educators to support our young people who are reading below level. Member Wilson turned the meeting over to the administration for a presentation.

Dr. Morgan shared that they also have educators on the meeting who are going to share their experience. Dr. Madera started with the history of the "University Design for Learning" that Massachusetts uses. She discussed the core components of MTSS. She further shared the five components of reading instruction: phonics, comprehension, vocabulary, fluency and phonological awareness. She discussed the expectations of students by the end of first grade. To accomplish those goals the district has implemented several reading initiatives. She shared about reading recovery which are daily one-one intervention for first-grade students for 12-120 weeks it supports reading, writing and letter-sound relationships. The two outcomes are accelerated learning and referral for additional literacy support. She discussed how they are measuring reading recovery effectiveness.

Dr. Gaab, from Harvard University, started her presentation. She gave an overview of typical reading development. She discussed how development of basic reading skills is one of the primary goals of elementary education. She shared that Nation's Report Card, which measures reading rates, no big changes in the last twenty-five years. She shared that about half of all our kids in MA are emerging from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade meeting reading levels, for black and latinx it was closer to a third (slide from Mass Literacy). She shared that 70 % of below average readers in 1<sup>st</sup> grade remain below average readers in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She discussed how reading improves learning. She then went out to "the reading disability umbrella": dyslexia and reading difficulty as a result of environmental circumstances such as low language skills, etc. They have a reactive model instead of a preventive/pro-active model. She further went on to explain the "dyslexia paradox". She discussed the importance of early intervention. She highlighted the work that Mass Literacy has done, she recommended the district use these resources.

Dr. Christodolou started her presentation. She presented on three topics: professional development collaborations at CPS, research collaboration with CPS, and science of reading at CPSD. She discussed professional development opportunities on early intervention. She discussed how there was "Summer @ MIT" which was designed to understand how children learn during the summer, there were 60 participants who were 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students at risk for reading difficulty. She discussed best practices for early screening.

Dr. Morgan shared that Dr. Melissa Orkin met with teachers since September, every other week, on a structured literacy routine.

Member Wilson opened the meeting for questions.

Member Killian asked how educators are bringing these statistics into their work. Dr. Christodolou discussed the transitional value of research is realizing that these numbers are coming from real people and the trainings to respond to debunking common myths. Member Killian discussed the importance of humanizing the numbers. Dr. Gaab discussed the importance of trainings not to be top down and that we can all learn from each other.

Mercedes Soto discussed the importance of using a more proactive approach and her personal experience of a child who has reading difficulties. She asked what needs to happen for our district to implement this and that there is a disconnect and the problems will continue to be exasperated with remote learning. Dr. Madera discussed that there is a shift that is needed. Dr. Morgan discussed how in the Student Services, the sub-separate were not able to access the materials and the frustration of students who are having difficulty reading. She shared that they introduced a new reading program.

Whitney, a sub-separate teacher discussed the reading programs she implements and shared her experience. She discussed how she sees young people of color who are reading at a lower level and the pain students feel from having reading difficulties. She discussed the importance of consistency, urgency and the importance of students developing confidence as readers.

Member Wilson extended the meeting for twenty minutes.

Lisa Downing discussed her personal experience with the mental health component of students having difficulty to read. She asked what else we can do in Cambridge besides screening. Could we use the science of reading to improve our Tier 1? Dr. Christodoulou discussed how there are continued opportunities for reflection and commended the openness off the district to new ideas. She discussed using the summer to improve reading, streamlining the process to help educators to help/collaborate and engage with families. Dr. Christodoulou discussed her excitement between the links of screening and practice. She highlighted it's important to understand that reading difficulties can take on many different forms not just dyslexia. Dr. Gaab discussed how it would be important to take a closer look on how the new programs are implemented.

Karen commented that 5<sup>th</sup> grade that 83% of students on IEPs are reading below grade levels-how are we then addressing that for each of those students and how are we assessing them continuously through the end of high school and seeing if what we are doing is having a positive effect. The other piece is reading recovery improvements how does this fit into that statistic, why is the district using this. Dr. Morgan spoke on how the pandemic effected education and the multi-pronged approach and how they are analyzing data and they are now working to help teachers do this remotely. Dr. Madera talked about how the reading recovery is used as an intervention.

Dr. Turk circled back to Mercedes' question on what will it take. It has taken the pandemic, that with all of the challenges, as educators one of the positive has forced us to think differently, have conversations differently and implement differently.

Member Wilson extended the meeting. Member Wilson opened the meeting to other Sub-Committee Members.

Member Weinstein discussed how he wants to hear from others on the call to touch on if a piece has been missing such as support or if there is something that we could emphasize. Mercedes discussed how she wants to see the district approve a bold goal that 80% of students of all students with different socio-economic and racial groups will be reading proficiently by third grade. Member Weinstein discussed how one perspective of the district goal would be setting it at 100%.

Member Rachel discussed how at a recent SE-PAC meeting there was talk about how many students are screened for dyslexia and is there some sort of evaluation of what programs we should be using. Member Wilson said that this should be discussed at a later time, Dr. Morgan concurred.

Karen discussed how every elementary school develop a reading curriculum that is science based, we want to make sure that best curriculum is being used across the board for every student. Dr. Turk discussed how there has been conversation to have something consistent across the schools.

Whitney discussed that it's important to think about early interventions.

Dr. Gaab discussed how with students who are having difficulty reading it is important to provide emotional support.

Sarah discussed her perspective as an educator that she is seeing that students who are having difficulty with reading have multiple diagnosis and her concerns about students having to switch educators every year and the need for emotional support.

Member Wilson discussed the empowerment that comes with learning. She further discussed how as a district for early intervention and how the pandemic provides the opportunity to reshape how we are doing things. Member Wilson ended the meeting at 8 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
Allison Daley  
Confidential Secretary to the School Committee Office